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UNCLAS CAIRO 004256

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR SREEBNY

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: CAIRO MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTION HELD UP OVER

REFERENDUM COVERAGE

REF: CAIRO 1061

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: Apparently objecting to coverage of referendum-related protests by the English-language weekly "Cairo Magazine," the Ministry of Information (MOI) withheld permission to distribute the June 2 edition of the magazine for four days. The magazine's staff was never informed by the MOI why permission was delayed, but has speculated that it was due to candid coverage of violence by pro-government protestors during the referendum. While permission to distribute was finally granted on the evening of June 5, the Editor-in-chief noted that the delay caused by the MOI has hurt the magazine's reputation with advertisers and distributors. End summary.

2. (SBU) Cairo Magazine (circulation: 5,000) is the reincarnation of Cairo Times, which shut down a year ago after repeated censorship problems with the MOI that took a toll on its advertising revenue. Despite its small circulation, Cairo Magazine tackles controversial issues in a professional manner that meets international standards. Cairo Magazine Managing Editor Issandr El Amrani told PA officer on June 4 that the June 2 edition of the magazine could not be distributed, since the Ministry of Information (MOI) had not granted it permission to do so. El Amrani reported that the MOI appeared to object to the edition's referendum coverage, which included photos of National Democratic Party (NDP) supporters assaulting opposition demonstrators.

3. (U) The June 2 edition's cover, entitled "Amendment Approved," carries a photo of two men fighting. The article in question, "The Day the Gloves Came Off," leads with the subheading "The violence of the referendum is a bad omen for the upcoming elections" and blamed NDP supporters for the violence: "According to witnesses and journalists, the responsibility for the violence rested on the people carrying the pro-government banners. NDP counter-demonstrations formed up in front of the Kifaya demonstration and then, once security moved out of the way to let them through, attacked the Kifaya members."

4. (SBU) The magazine was initially given to the MOI for approval on June 1, but on June 2 an MOI official said it would need to be sent to Information Minister Anas El Fekki for his clearance. No further explanation was offered. When approval to distribute was granted late in the evening on June 5, no explanation for the delay was given. "It seems like it was their way of flexing some muscle with us," El Amrani told PA officer on June 6.

5. (U) The magazine's website (www.cairomagazine.com), which posted the June 2 edition on time, explained its absence from Cairo's streets by saying: "Cairo (Magazine) apologizes to its regular readers for the delay in the distribution of the current issue. This delay is outside our control, as the Ministry of Information has yet to grant a permit for this issue to be distributed in Egypt."

6. (SBU) When asked why the magazine staff had not removed the article in question, as happened with an article in Egypt Today several months ago (reftel), El Amrani explained, "We have an 'all or nothing' censorship policy. If the Information Ministry wants to censor an article, they have to censor the entire magazine. That way, it should be harder for them to censor us without causing a fuss."

7. (SBU) Comment: Though no explanation was given for the delay, it seems very likely the MOI wanted to diminish the impact of Cairo Magazine's upfront reporting on the role the NDP faithful played in the March 25 violence. Cairo Magazine's leadership remains optimistic about the magazine's future issues and relationship with the MOI, but is concerned that delay tactics such as these could hurt its relationship with its advertisers and distributors. This is only the magazine's eleventh issue, and already it is finding its "all or nothing" censorship policy and its financial future tested. End Comment.

GRAY

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